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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 001467

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MASS](#) [ASEC](#) [SNAR](#) [PTER](#) [PBTS](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: MGLE01: A/S HILLEN MEETS WITH LAF COMMANDER
SULEIMAN

REF: BEIRUT 1369

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Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman. Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: On May 4, Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs Hillen, accompanied by Ambassador, DATT, and ODC Chief, met with Lebanese Armed Forces Commander Michel Suleiman at the Lebanese Armed Forces Headquarters at the Ministry of Defense. Suleiman welcomed the prospect of greater cooperation between the American and Lebanese militaries and was pleased that President Bush is keen on moving quickly on Section 1206 assistance. Suleiman informed A/S Hillen that Jordan offered M60 tanks to Lebanon but questioned the value added to the Lebanese Army if they are acquired. Instead he stated that it may be more useful to acquire anti-tank equipment. A/S Hillen encouraged Suleiman to take full advantage of the security reform proposals offered by the United Kingdom in order to help bring to light potential redundancies between LAS and ISF. Suleiman called the Syrian-built earthen berms in the Biq'a Valley a Syrian violation and stressed that Lebanon and Syria must have clear borders. He added that at this point the situation on the border is tense but not violent. END SUMMARY.

USG MOVING FAST TO
STRENGTHEN LEBANESE ARMY

12. (C) A/S Hillen praised Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's productive meeting with the President. He noted that President Bush is keen on elevating the relationship between the American and Lebanese military by "moving quickly" on Section 1206 military assistance. He added that both Secretary of State Rice and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld have made it clear that supporting the Lebanese Army will be a swift process. Although he did not mention monetary figures, A/S Hillen emphasized opportunities for greater cooperation including the training of Lebanese military personnel and providing equipment and spare parts for Lebanese military vehicles and aircraft. He said that the support from the leaders of our respective governments makes this the ideal moment to strengthen the American and Lebanese military relationship.

13. (C) LAF Commander Suleiman welcomed the prospect of greater cooperation between the two militaries and thanked A/S Hillen for the support already demonstrated by the USG. Smiling, he said that he and his staff are ready to elaborate on everything needed to strengthen the Lebanese army, while gesturing that the list would be long.

14. (C) A/S Hillen advised him that an equipment inventory package was assembled with the cooperation of the Pentagon. The package is currently awaiting the President's signature. Both the Department of State and Department of Defense will take action quickly to fulfill the terms of the package once it is signed. Ambassador added that all obligations must be executed by the end of September, noting that "this is fast." He stressed that this is an important piece of the USG's support for an independent and free Lebanon.

15. (C) LAF Commander Suleiman recollected the USG's strong support for the Lebanese army in 1999 when 80 officers were invited to the United States for training and coursework. ODC Chief LTC Crockett reminded Suleiman that close to 100 officers went to the United States in 1999. LTC Crockett emphasized the need for Lebanon to take advantage of expanded training opportunities now. For example, helicopter pilot training would be extremely helpful for the Lebanese Army as the ability to safely fly helicopters is a critical element in the renewal of core LAF competencies. Although this training program is expensive it will pay good dividends.

LAF QUESTIONS WISDOM OF ACQUIRING
M60 TANKS FROM JORDAN

16. (C) General Suleiman informed A/S Hillen that Jordan offered M60 tanks to Lebanon. He was not sure of the condition of the tanks. He stressed that if the tanks were

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not in good condition it did not make sense for the Lebanese Army to acquire them. Instead he stated that it may be more useful to acquire anti-tank equipment as an alternative. He added that the Prime Minister called him the previous day to inquire about when he will travel to Jordan. He told the Prime Minister that he is waiting for an invitation from the Jordanian army. Suleiman then asked if Jordan intended to use U.S. aid to fund the tanks to Lebanon.

17. (C) ODC Chief reminded Suleiman that CENTCOM performed an assessment of Lebanon's military equipment in December 2005. It found that \$105.6 million were needed to rehabilitate the equipment. This figure did not include purchasing ammunition and new equipment. He reminded Suleiman that we do not know how much money the President will allocate to strengthening the Lebanese army. However when a dollar figure is announced by President Bush the Lebanese army must consider how to maximize the funding it receives.

18. (C) Suleiman acknowledged that LAF has enough tanks to fulfill its tasks. He said the focus should be on acquiring anti-tank equipment because it is cheaper and more efficient in Lebanon's terrain. General Suleiman also noted the need to arm LAF Helicopters for self defense, acquire spare parts to maintain vehicles and equipment, and ammunition to allow for effective training.

PUSHING FOR THE BRITISH
SECURITY PROPOSAL

19. (C) A/S Hillen encouraged Suleiman to take full advantage of the Security Sector Reform Program offered by the United Kingdom. The British proposal is a solid complement to the efforts to reinvigorate the relationship between the American and Lebanese armies. Security reform is essential to reduce redundancies and improve coordination.

In addition, it would be useful for a member of the Prime Minister's staff to take on a coordinating role that ties together the political impetus and military logic. Dr. Hillen stressed that doing so will encourage cooperation and communication between the political and military sectors. The Defense Attache emphasized that the UK Program would also help increase coordination between the LAF and the ISF.

¶10. (C) Suleiman said that a unit for counter-terrorism exists in ISF although National Defense Law places counter-terrorism as the mission of LAF. The ODC Chief suggested that the ISF should focus on improving and expanding its basic police and investigative responsibilities. By contrast, the LAF has units trained in counter-terrorism and hostage rescue missions. The ODC chief suggested that the UK security sector reform proposal would help bring to light potential redundancies between LAF and ISF. Ambassador remarked that the British program will ultimately result in a strategic plan for the GOL that can be referred to when there is confusion or disagreement between military leaders and politicians.

¶11. (C) Suleiman insisted that security is the responsibility of all institutions. However, the ISF has the advantage in the towns and villages because ISF personnel know people on the ground. Security starts with the police in the village and municipal guards, both of which he claimed are almost non-existent. He added that the Lebanese laws in place are sufficient if implemented. "Our laws have not been implemented for 30 years," he stated.

DEMARCATIION

¶12. (C) Ambassador asked Suleiman about the widely reported Syrian-built earthen berms in the Biqa' Valley (reftel). Suleiman said that the dispute includes both land ownership and sovereignty issues. He called the earthen berms a Syrian violation and stressed that both countries must have clear borders. If the Sheba'a farms cannot be demarcated for political and military reasons then the process can start in the north. He commented that in the past when the issue of demarcation was raised on both sides, Syria would scuffle at the thought because "Lebanon was province of Syria." However

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now there is at least a recognition by Syria that demarcation is needed. As for the specific problem of the berms east of Ras Baalbek, Suleiman suggested that we should wait for news from the Governor of Beka', after he holds meetings in Syria next week to discuss the issue with the Governor of the Damascus Region.

¶13. (C) The Ambassador reminded Suleiman that last year the UN sent a delegation to validate that Syrian forces withdrew from Lebanon, per the requirements of UNSCR 1559. Now Syrian check points are being moved four kilometers into Lebanese territory from where they were a year ago. Some countries on the Security Council may ask for a new delegation to come to Lebanon again, but this time the answer may be "more difficult." Suleiman said that at this point the situation on the border is tense but not violent. There is no fighting. He explained that in the past Lebanese farmers on the border had good relations with Syria and this may one day be the case again.

¶14. (U) A/S Hillen has cleared this message.
FELTMAN